

Hakusangu Shrine

Located within Kaminashi in Gokayama, Hakusangu Shrine dates back to the early Nara period (710–794), when it was first established at Mt. Ningyo in Gifu Prefecture before moving to its current location in 1125. The current main shrine was rebuilt in 1502; the oldest wooden structure in Toyama Prefecture, it is designated as a national Important Cultural Property. The main shrine can be found inside the *sayado*, a building that protects the shrine from the region's harsh climate. The roof and structure of the *sayado* resemble the *gassho-zukuri* (steep thatched-roof style) architecture in the area.

The main shrine is usually not open to the public, but visitors can get a glimpse of it during the autumn Kokiriko Festival. Held annually on September 25 and 26, the festival features the performance of Gokayama folk songs, including the ancient Kokiriko Bushi to celebrate an abundant harvest season. This traditional performance has been passed down the generations in the villages of Gokayama, and is characterized by the playing of instruments from the region such as the *sasara*, a clapper made from wooden slats connected by a cord.

The sacred body (*shintai*) of the deity enshrined as a statue inside the main shrine is put on view to the public only once every 33 years. The most recent such viewing was in May 2019, for two days. The shrine precincts are surrounded by large trees and lush foliage, making it a peaceful spot.